



PSC NEWS

Missouri Public Service Commission

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PSC STAFF FILES REPORT AND COMPLAINT IN KANSAS CITY NATURAL GAS INCIDENT

Jefferson City (September 16, 2003)---The Staff of the Missouri Public Service Commission has filed a Gas Incident Report regarding a March 9, 2003, natural gas explosion in Kansas City, Missouri. The incident, at 3441 Chestnut Avenue, occurred when natural gas accumulated inside the residence and ignited. The home at 3441 Chestnut Avenue sustained severe damage from the explosion and fire. There were no injuries or fatalities.

As a result of its investigation, the PSC Staff has filed a complaint against Missouri Gas Energy (MGE) alleging the natural gas company violated a Commission rule which states that each operator shall prepare and follow a manual of written procedures for conducting operations and maintenance activities and for emergency response. The PSC Staff states in its report that it does not believe that the probable violation of this Commission rule contributed to the incident.

The PSC Staff report alleges: "The MGE serviceman did not follow Company procedures during his leak investigation at 3433 Chestnut. The level of gas concentrations found (20% gas) by the MGE serviceman warranted immediate actions directed toward evacuation of the residents. As a result of the MGE serviceman's lack of acknowledgement of the existing conditions and failure to follow Company procedures, lives were unnecessarily kept in a hazardous condition." The PSC Staff report further noted: "Had a proper ignition source been introduced to gas concentrations within the flammable range of natural gas, an explosion would have most likely occurred at 3433 Chestnut."

According to the PSC Staff report, the probable cause of the incident was a circumferential crack in a 6-inch cast iron natural gas main which allowed natural gas to escape and permeate the surrounding soil. Staff believes that natural gas escaping from the cracked cast iron main most likely found its way into the sewer lateral, entered through a drain at 3441 Chestnut Avenue, accumulated to a flammable atmosphere, and was ignited by an unidentified ignition source. The PSC Staff report states that the cause of the cast iron main fracture was the application of external forces in combination with insufficient pipe support from backfill material, which resulted in induced stresses beyond the yield point at the fracture location. According to the report, records indicate that sewer excavation activities occurred in the area of the fracture and backfill material consisting of sand and gravel provide evidence of prior excavation activities. MGE reports that it was not aware of the sewer excavation and did not receive a locate request notification.

The PSC Staff report contains a number of recommendations, one of which is a request to keep the case open for an additional six-month period so that the PSC Staff can further investigate the excavations that occurred prior to the incident at the location of the break in the 6-inch cast iron main and MGE's overall cast iron main replacement program.

In its complaint, the PSC Staff has asked the Commission for authority to go to circuit court to seek penalties against MGE. If the case goes to court, the court will ultimately decide whether there should be penalties assessed and the amount.

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